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The Falcon has flown the coop, but is he in from the cold yet?

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Los Angeles—One night last October, a man named Robert Lindsey was sitting in his living room reading a book, when the telephone rang. It was about 8 o'clock. Mr. Lindsey's wife answered the phone. She said a few words, then she called her husband.

"It's for you."
Mr. Lindsey put down his book and placed the receiver against his ear. The first thing he heard was the sound of coins falling into a telephone box. It was his son, he immediately figured, calling long distance from the college he attended.

But then the man on the other end said a few words, and Bob Lindsey realized this wasn't his son after all.

"Tell my mother I love her," said the voice crackling down the wire. "Tell my father I love him, too."

Listening to the words, Mr. Lindsey drew a sharp breath.

For the caller was none other than Christopher John Boyce. Boyce, the traitor. The one who had peddled the secrets to the Russians. The one who had been sentenced to 40 years in prison, and the one who had then somehow managed to escape from maximum security.

The one Robert Lindsey himself, in a recent book, had nicknamed "The Falcon."

Mr. Lindsey asked Boyce where he was calling from.

The Falcon laughed out loud.

"I'm going to have to tell the authorities you called," said Mr. Lindsey.

"I really wish you wouldn't," and The Falcon laughed again.

Then the writer told the spy that they would soon be making a movie about him. Carefully, Mr. Lindsey explained that Twentieth Century-Fox—the studio moguls were located right up the road in Hollywood—were planning a film version of the sequence of events in which The Falcon, as a mere youth of 22, had first stolen and then peddled top-secret information about an American spy satellite program to the Soviet Union.

Once again, The Falcon laughed. Then, eager for the inside scoop, he pressed Robert Lindsey: "How does the film end, do you know?"

The writer scratched his head. "That," he said, wondering himself where all of these strange events were leading, where they would ultimately end, "depends on you."

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This is a story about a Catholic altar boy, the son of an FBI agent, who dreamed of growing up and one day playing football for Notre Dame, but who instead grew up to become a convicted traitor, a man sentenced to a virtual lifetime in prison for betraying precious secrets to the Soviet Union.

It is also the story of a particular place—the rolling, palm-studded, sun-drenched hills of Southern California's affluent, upper middle-class suburbs—and of a particular time—the late 1960s and early 1970s—when millions of youthful Americans discovered they didn't care much for the values they had been taught.

And it is, finally, the story of two enormous intelligence agencies, the American CIA and the Russian KGB, both of which appear to have been thoroughly duped in a bizarre espionage struggle which often bordered on outright farce.

For Chris Boyce, however, and for his schoolmate, Daulton Lee, there was nothing comical about the comedy of errors which their traitorous behavior ultimately provoked.

Only a few years after their decision to trade U.S. defense secrets to the Russians for cash (Lee, allegedly, because he wanted money for drugs; Boyce, allegedly, because he was disillusioned with the American "system," and wanted revenge against those who ran it), both young men would be convicted of treason in a California federal court and sentenced to several decades in prison.

But then, and again incredibly, Chris Boyce would cheat the jailers who had been charged with incarcerating him; using techniques he had picked up while watching a TV movie inside the prison, The Falcon would scale a wall, slice his way through two electrified fences, and then simply fly away.

This happened last January; Chris Boyce has not been seen since.

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The action began on a warm spring afternoon in April, 1975, when a young man named Andrew Daulton Lee strolled into the Soviet Embassy in Mexico City and presented a startled security guard with a package and a note.

The note said: "Enclosed is a computer card from a National Security Agency crypto system. If you want to do business, please advise the courier."

The Russians were definitely interested. After pouring their visitor a large belt of vodka, they hurried off to a nearby office to examine the materials he'd brought.

They could hardly believe their eyes. Unless these documents were forgeries, young Mr. Lee had just presented them with sensitive data from a top-secret espionage operation then being run by the United States.

The Soviets, in short, were looking at several classified computer cards, and at a 12-inch section of paper tape which had been pilfered from two American espionage coding devices: the KG-13 and KW-7 "crypto machines."

They were looking at top-secret data from an operation known as "Project Rhyolite." And Project Rhyolite, as it turned out, was nothing less than the keystone of the ongoing U.S. spy satellite program—an espionage network so secret that most of the American government had never even heard of it.

The Russians stalled. They went over the materials again and again. Then, after plying Daulton Lee with more vodka and after slipping him \$250 for his package, they agreed to do business with him on a regular basis. On his next visit to Mexico City, the Soviets would pick him up at a downtown restaurant and the commerce would begin in earnest.

Before it ended, almost two years later, the American spy satellite program would be dangerously compromised. The American bargaining position at the continuing U.S.-Soviet Strategic Arms Limitations Talks would be weakened, since both sides had earlier agreed to a prohibition against using satellites as spies-in-the-sky. American relations with Australia, an important ally, would be severely strained, after it was learned that the Australians had permitted the Americans to monitor their satellites from tracking stations hidden deep in the Australian bush.

Indeed, the fallout from the Boyce-Lee affair would be so heavy that the U.S. Justice Department and the CIA, fearing that more crucial defense secrets might be revealed during public trials, would think long and hard before finally deciding to prosecute the pair.

But the trials eventually took place. And when they did, the American intelligence community and Americans in general were shocked to learn how vulnerable their espionage networks had actually been.

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